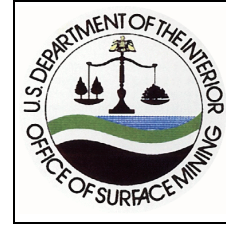




**US Army Corps
of Engineers**



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release May 29, 2003

Agencies Release Draft Environmental Impact Statement

To Improve Environmental Protection from Coal Mining Impacts

WASHINGTON D.C. Federal and state agencies released today, for public review, a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) recommending new actions to further enhance protection for Appalachian streams from effects associated with mountaintop coal mining.

The draft EIS recommends actions designed specifically to ensure more effective protection for human health and the environment while enabling the Nation to continue to receive the energy benefits of cleaner burning Appalachian coal, according to a joint statement released by the agencies. The statement goes on to say that, "The additional steps recommended in the draft EIS build upon Federal and State actions undertaken in recent years that are effectively reducing mountaintop coal mining related environmental impacts.

Information in the draft EIS shows that program improvements put in place by Federal and State agencies since 1998 are contributing to increased environmental protection during mountaintop coal mining. Permit data comparing surface coal mining operations approved since 1998, with those authorized for the five years prior to 1998, show that the total area of Appalachian watersheds covered by valley fills was cut by over 50 percent and the total length of streams covered by these fills was cut by over 25 percent.

The draft EIS evaluates a broad range of additional Federal and State actions proposed to further prevent or reduce adverse environmental impacts to Appalachian streams, as well as to clarify lines of responsibility among the agencies designed to improve compliance with and enforcement of the Clean Water Act and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

(more)

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The draft EIS recommends that Federal and State agencies work cooperatively to make the following program enhancements applicable to mountaintop coal mining operations:

- Better stream protection from direct, indirect and cumulative impacts by improved characterization of aquatic resources and more effective prediction of the nature of potential adverse effects.
- Improved compensatory mitigation requirements to ensure that there is full replacement of lost aquatic functions through stream restoration with improved design, inspection and enforcement.
- More watershed level advance planning to identify special/high value environmental resources where impacts should be avoided.
- Review current Clean Water Act water quality standards to ensure they protect against potential water quality impacts downstream of mining operations and require better stream monitoring.
- Clarify Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act regulations to ensure that, where fills are necessary, they are as small as possible and located where they cause the least environmental impact.
- Develop Best Management Practices (BMPs) for mine site reclamation to better avoid and minimize adverse environmental impacts.
- Develop BMPs that promote the benefits of reforestation.
- Prepare guidance for improved surface water runoff analysis from mining operations to ensure these operations do not increase the risk of floods.
- Prepare BMPs for improving the control of fugitive dust and blasting fumes under the Clean Air Act.
- Develop additional specific protection plans for threatened and endangered species.

The agencies involved in preparation of the draft EIS include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Surface Mining, and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.

The geographic focus of the area covered in the EIS is about 12 million acres encompassing most of eastern Kentucky, southern West Virginia, western Virginia and scattered areas of east Tennessee. The area contains about 59,000 miles of streams. Many of these streams are often very small, but are ecologically important waters from which larger streams and rivers originate.

(more)

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The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that 28.5 million tons of high quality (high heating value, low sulfur content) coal remains in the study area. This coal makes an important contribution to the energy needs of the nation and the economy – 52 percent of American energy comes from coal. By providing jobs and tax revenue, coal mining is a key component of the regional economy. Almost all of the electricity generated in the area comes from coal-fired power plants. Constantly improving technologies are being developed and installed to reduce air pollution from coal-fired power plants. To read more about Federal efforts underway to build a zero-emissions coal-fired power plant, visit <http://www.eere.energy.gov/hydrogenandfuelcells/>.

The agencies have distributed copies of the draft EIS to known interested parties and have posted the draft EIS and appendices on the internet at the EPA Region III website at: <http://www.epa.gov/region3/mtnstop/index.htm>. Copies can also be viewed at local agency offices and public libraries (a distribution list follows). Copies may also be requested by calling the EPA Region III toll free EIS Request Hotline at 1-800-228-8711.

The public comment period on the draft EIS begins tomorrow, May 30th, when the agencies expect that a Notice of Availability will be published in the Federal Register, and will close on August 29. Two public hearings will be held during this period: the first will be held in Hazard, KY on July 22 at The Forum at the Hal Rogers Center, 101 Bulldog Lane, and the second will be held in Charleston, WV on July 24 at the Charleston Civic Center – Little Theater, 200 Civic Center Drive. Each hearing will consist of two sessions: the first session will be from 2:00pm – 5:00pm and the second be from 7:00pm to 11:00pm on the same day. The public is invited to provide oral comments on the Draft EIS during these hearings and provide written comments during the comment period. Written comments should be submitted by August 29, 2003, to Mr. John Forren, U.S. EPA (3ES30), 1650 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103 .

For further information, please contact David Hewitt of the Corps of Engineers at (202) 761-0289 or Suzanne Fournier of the Corps of Engineers at (513) 684-3010, John Millett of EPA at (202) 564-7842 or Bonnie Smith of EPA at (215) 814-5543, Mitch Snow of the Fish and Wildlife Service at (202) 208-5634, Mike Gauldin of the Office of Surface Mining at (202) 208-2565, or Jessica Greathouse of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection at (304) 558-4253.